

I, David Straub, scanned Eddie Rickenbacker's letter and created this file on August 6, 2012. The original letter is from the personal collection of my father, Jon H. Straub. My father purchased the letter from an autograph dealer in the 1980s. I release any rights to the contexts of this file to the public. You may freely distribute and reproduce this file. If you have any questions, contact me at davestraub@yahoo.com .

This document contains a scanned copy and text version of a letter written on April 18, 1944 by Eddie Rickenbacker (1890-1973), President of Eastern Air Lines and a noted American air ace during WWI. The letter is addressed to a Mr. C. M. Smith of 10-79th Street, Brooklyn 20, N. Y. The two page letter concerns Mr. Rickenbacker's reaction to a statement by Oscar Gottlieb (O. G.) Christgau (1908-1971), the state superintendant of the Iowa Anti-Saloon League. Christgau's letter, which was quoted in a wire story that appeared in the New York Times on April 16, questioned Rickenbacker's remarks made shortly before that he would buy a case of Scotch whisky for Major Richard Bong (1920-1945), the United States' highest-scoring air ace of World War II. Rickenbacker had previously stated that he would buy a case of Scotch for the first pilot to break his record of twenty-sixth enemy aircraft downed and Bong had recently shot down his twenty-seventh enemy aircraft.

Also included in this file is the original text of that letter from Oscar Gottlieb Christgau as is quoted in the April 16, 1944 New York Times article.

The following references were used to write the above text.

"Dry Fears Rickenbacker May Corrupt U.S. Fliers." The United Press. The New York Times. April 16, 1944. p. 21.

<<http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=FB0811FD3959147B93C4A8178FD85F408485F9>>
(Pay firewall)

"Eddie Rickenbacker." Wikipedia. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eddie_Rickenbacker>

"Oscar Gottlieb Christgau Papers 1908-1971." Bentley Historical Library. University of Michigan Digital Library. <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/b/bhlead/umich-bhl-85988?subview=standard;view=reslist>>

"Richard Bong." Wikipedia. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Bong>

"Rickenbacker Offers Scotch for Ace Flyer." UP story. Prescott Evening Courier. Vol. LXII. No. 90. April 14, 1944. p. 1.

<<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=897&dat=19440414&id=ah5TAAAAIBAJ&sjid=5oEDAAAAIBAJ&pg=5799,4450446>>



EASTERN AIR LINES

INCORPORATED

EASTERN AIR LINES BUILDING · 10 ROCKEFELLER PLAZA
NEW YORK 20

OFFICE OF
THE PRESIDENT

April 18, 1944

MEMBER OF THE
NATIONAL SAFETY COUNCIL

Mr. C. M. Smith
10 - 79th Street
Brooklyn 20, N. Y.

My dear Mr. Smith:

I appreciate very much your kind letter of April 16 and being the father of a fighting son you can understand such comments that have come from sanctimonious O. G. Christgau.

Naturally, my impulse was to burn him up in answer to his telegram but on second thought I realized that all he would do would be to use it for publicity purposes and probably the easiest way out was to ignore him, which I decided to do.

Yes, you are correct - if we had a couple of bottles of Scotch aboard those rafts in the Pacific, there would have been a lot less suffering and in all probability the youngster who passed away would be with us today.

Very frankly, I have found the medical profession recommending to our boys in the field upon returning from a long mission a drink of brandy or spirits to help them relax their nerves and give them a chance to get a few hours sleep.

To me this makes a lot of sense and certainly does not make drunkards because if a man is going to fall by the wayside, he will do it without any prompting or help.

C. M. Smith

April 18, 1944

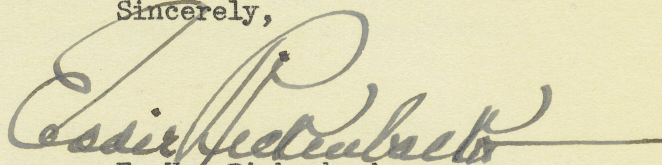
You must be very proud of your youngster and from the clipping, which I am returning herewith, he is a grand looking chap.

My only hope is that he will keep himself mentally and physically fit and not try to kill all the Japs at once, for the war is a long ways from being over, unfortunately, and he will have plenty of time to break my record of World War 1.

Tell him for me that the only good dead aviators I know of are those belonging to the enemy.

In closing I wish to send my every best wish for his success and safe return to him directly, and to you and your family.

Sincerely,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "E. V. Rickenbacker". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

E. V. Rickenbacker
President and General
Manager

EVR:sdl
Enc.

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Sincerely,

Eddie Rickenbacker (signature)

E. V. Rickenbacker
President and General Manager
EVR:sdl. Enc.

The following is text from the letter written by Oscar Gottlieb Christgau to Eddie Rickenbacker that is mentioned in the above letter. The text below was quote in "Dry Fears Rickenbacker May Corrupt U.S. Fliers." The United Press. The New York Times. April 16, 1944. P. 21.

<<http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=FB0811FD3959147B93C4A8178FD85F408485F9>>

"If incorrectly quoted, I urge you to repudiate the statement immediately. If correctly quoted I urge you to consider the far-reaching implications of your press endorsement of whisky for American fliers."

The teen-age alcohol program is serious enough without having the First World War ace filer glorifying whisky by publicly offering a prize to the idolized flying hero of the present World War. What good would a case of Scotch have done you while you were on that life raft? Thousands of preachers who referred to your providential survival will be deeply disappointed if you have been correctly quoted."

Note: Christgau's comments about Rickenbacker's time on a life raft is a reference to the twenty-four days in October and November 1942 that Rickenbacker spent a drift in the Pacific Ocean after the B-17 he was flying in was ditched at sea. At the time Rickenbacker was touring the Pacific in support of the US war effort. Rickenbacker and all but one crew member survived the ordeal and were rescued at sea by the U.S. Navy. (source: "Eddie Rickenbacker." Wikipedia. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eddie_Rickenbacker>)